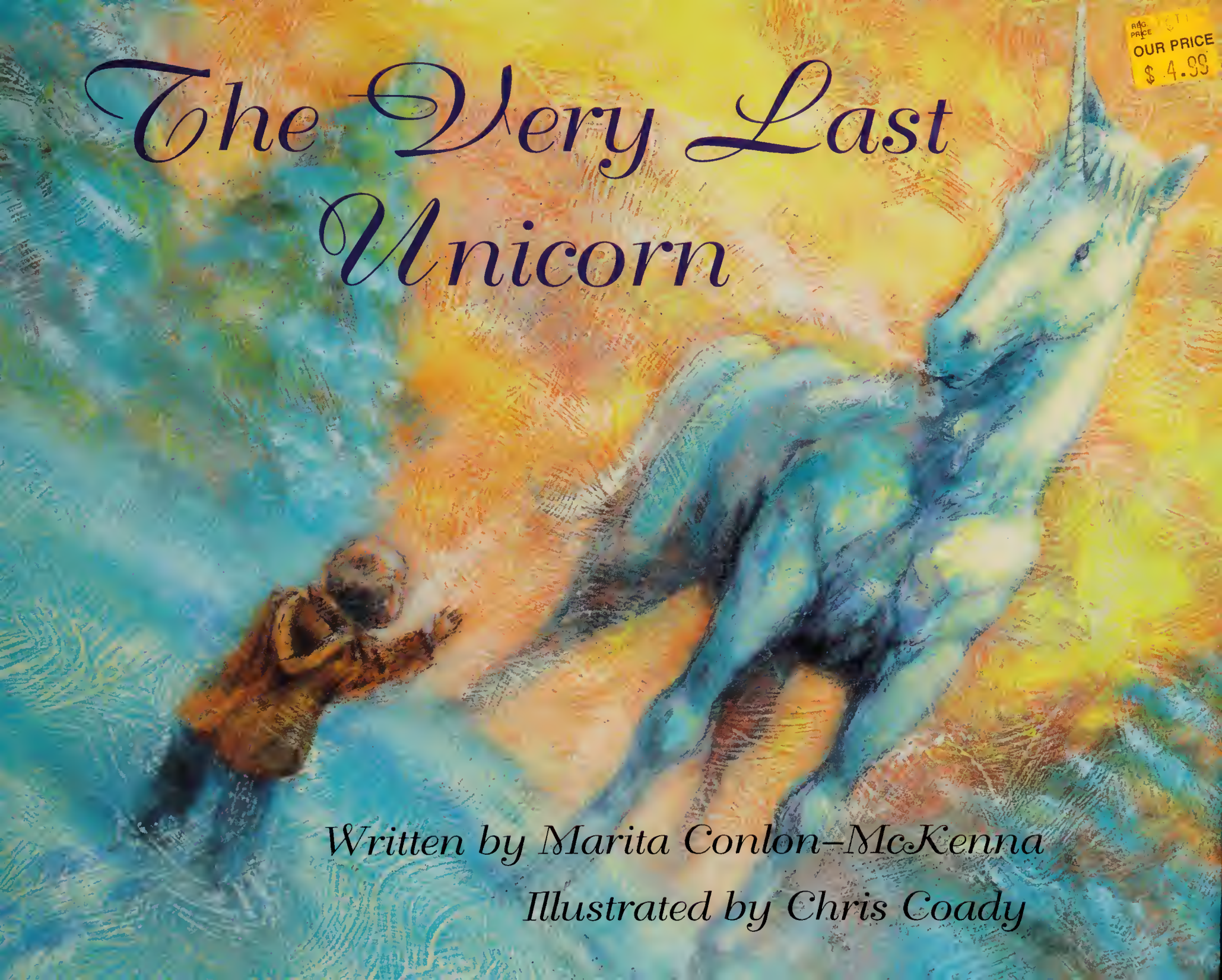
The Very Last Unicorn
Written by Marita Conlon-McKenna
Illustrated by Chris Coady
OUR PRICE
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The Very Last Unicorn

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It was a cold and snowy day when Sam first saw the unicorn. He ran outside to get closer to the wonderful creature, and when he did, the unicorn spoke. It told Sam that it was the very last of its kind on the earth and that it desperately needed a place to live where it could feel safe.

Sam comes up with the sorts of ideas a young boy might envision — the zoo, the circus — but the unicorn knows that they won't do. After all, it *is* the very last unicorn and needs a very special safe place.

The simple and perfect solution that Sam eventually decides upon is the culmination of this beautifully illustrated tale.

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Property of
Janice
Stone

For my father, Patrick J. Conlon, who
first told me about 'unicorns'
MC-M

For my family and friends
CC

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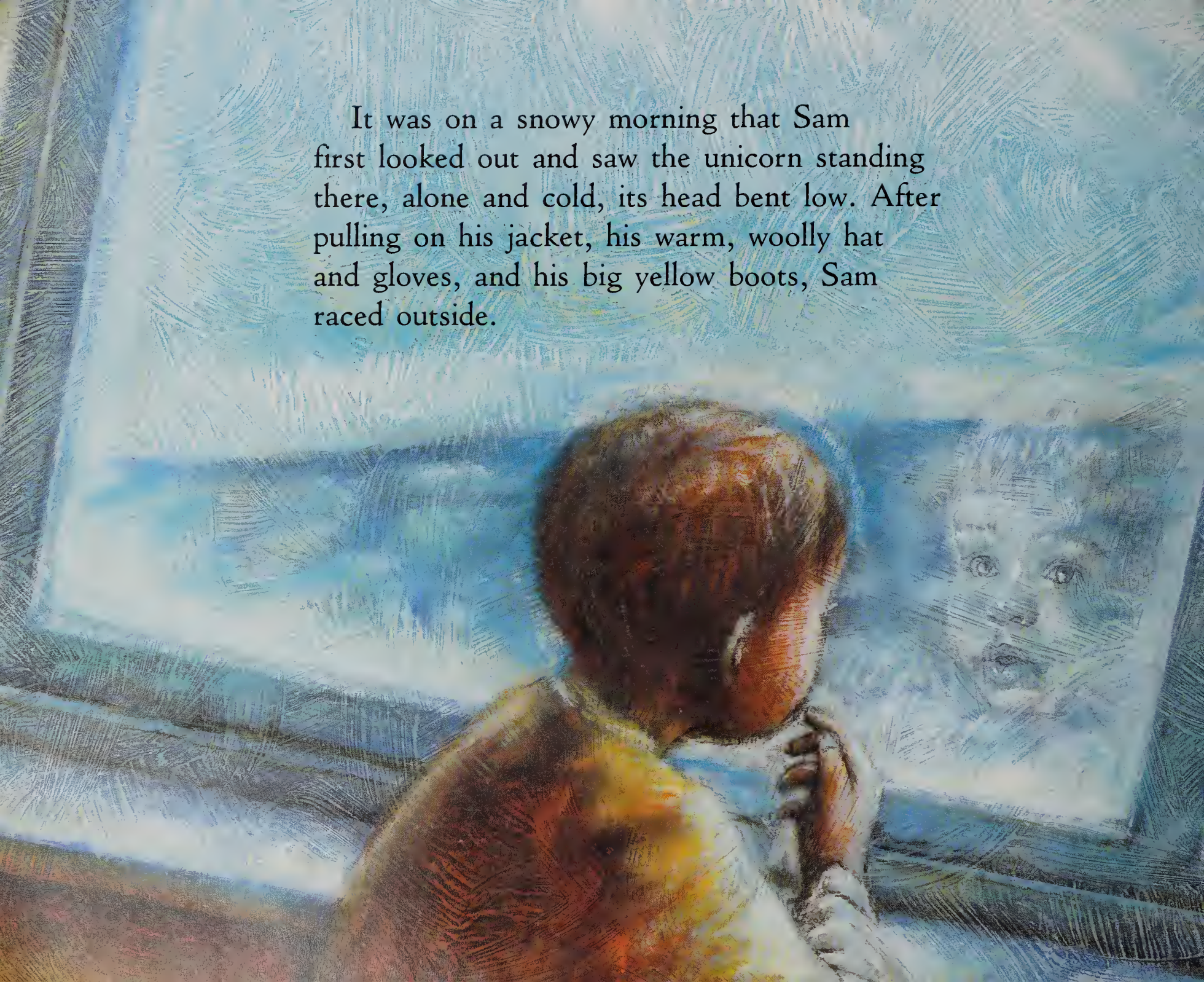
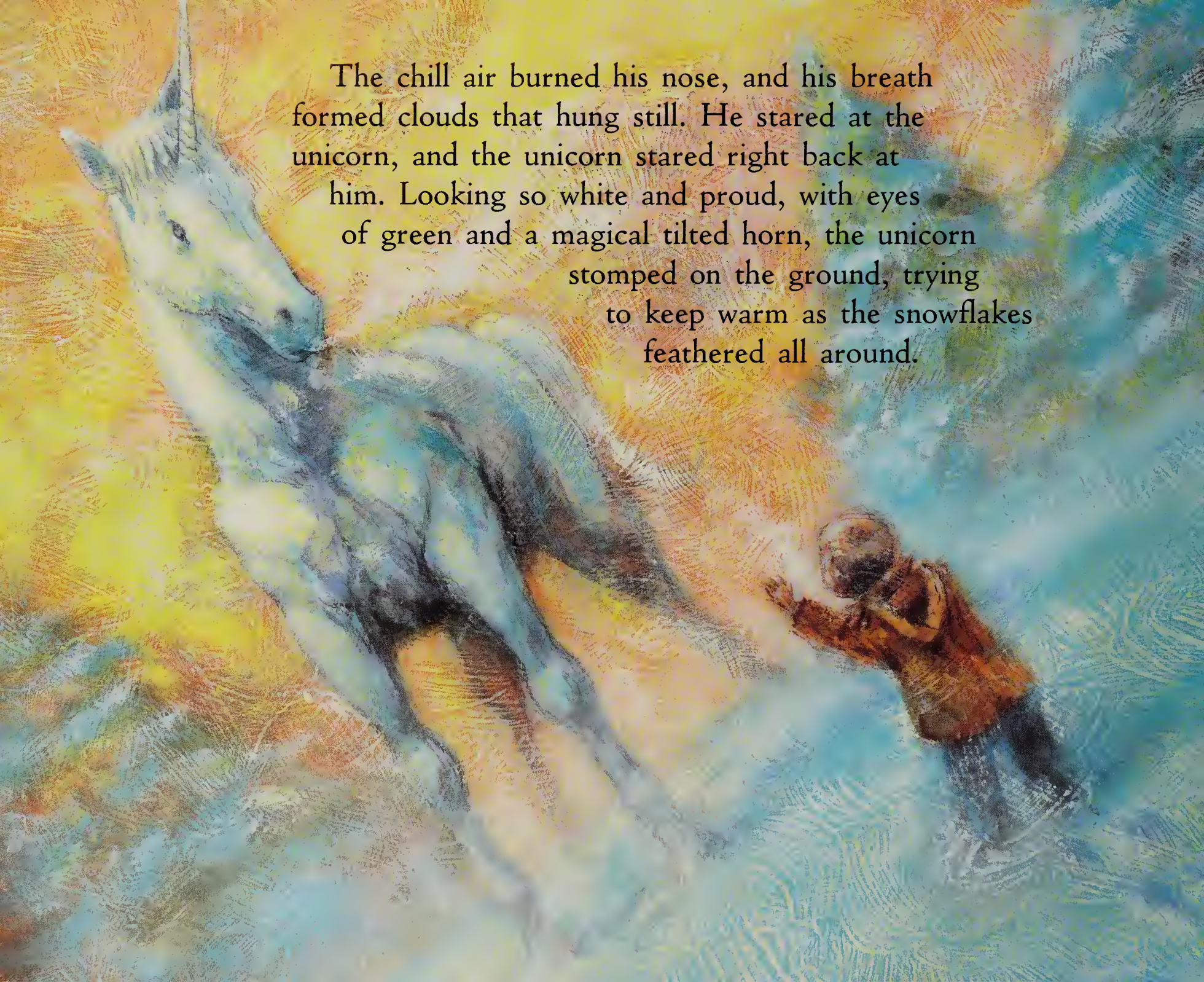


It was on a snowy morning that Sam first looked out and saw the unicorn standing there, alone and cold, its head bent low. After pulling on his jacket, his warm, woolly hat and gloves, and his big yellow boots, Sam raced outside.

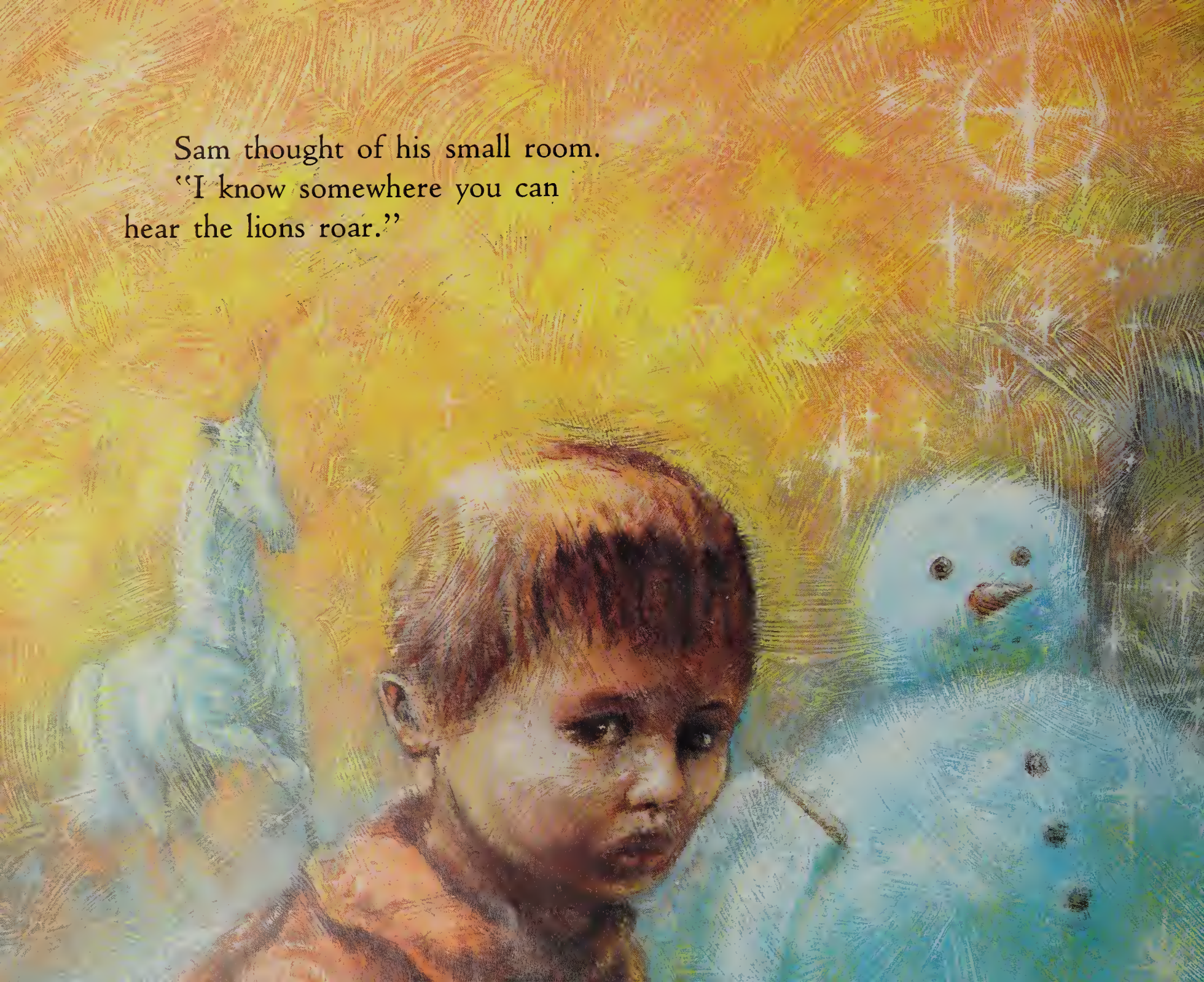


The chill air burned his nose, and his breath formed clouds that hung still. He stared at the unicorn, and the unicorn stared right back at him. Looking so white and proud, with eyes of green and a magical tilted horn, the unicorn stomped on the ground, trying to keep warm as the snowflakes feathered all around.

"I am the one and only, the very last unicorn in the world."

"Oh!" said Sam.

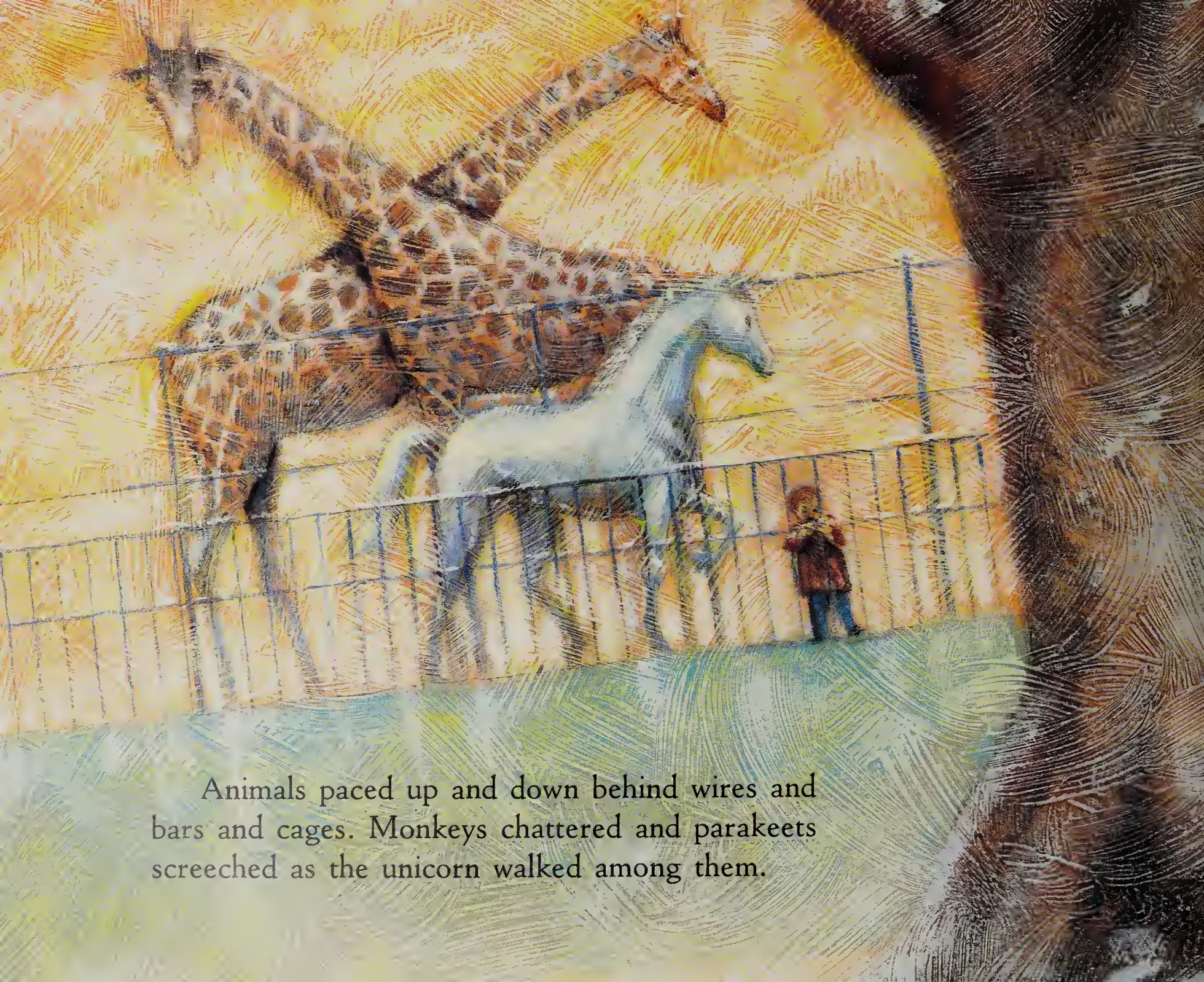
"I am lonely, and I need a home. I have nowhere to go."



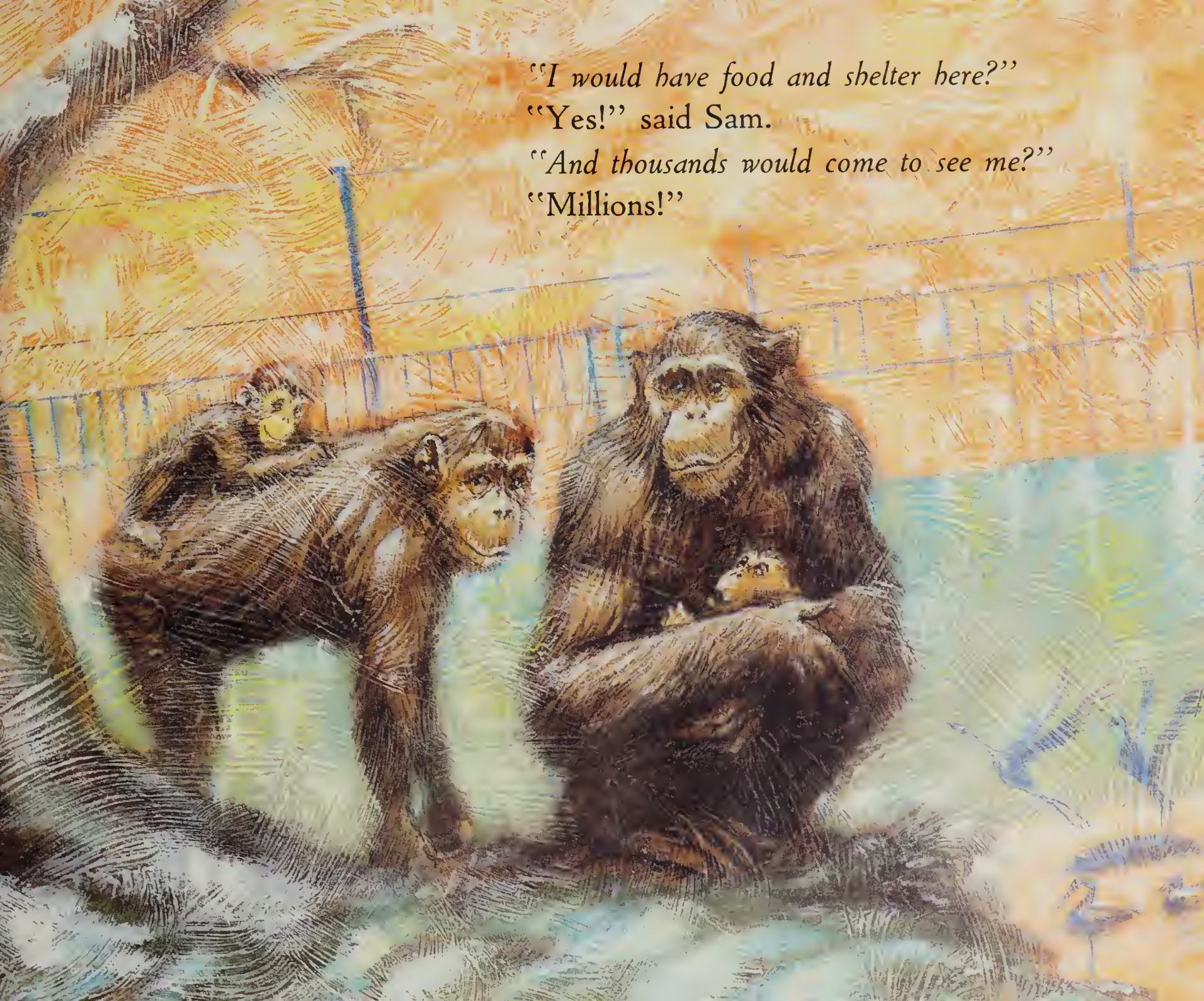
Sam thought of his small room.
"I know somewhere you can
hear the lions roar."

Sam led the unicorn to the town zoo. "It's full of animals and birds here. They are safe, and hundreds of people come to see them."

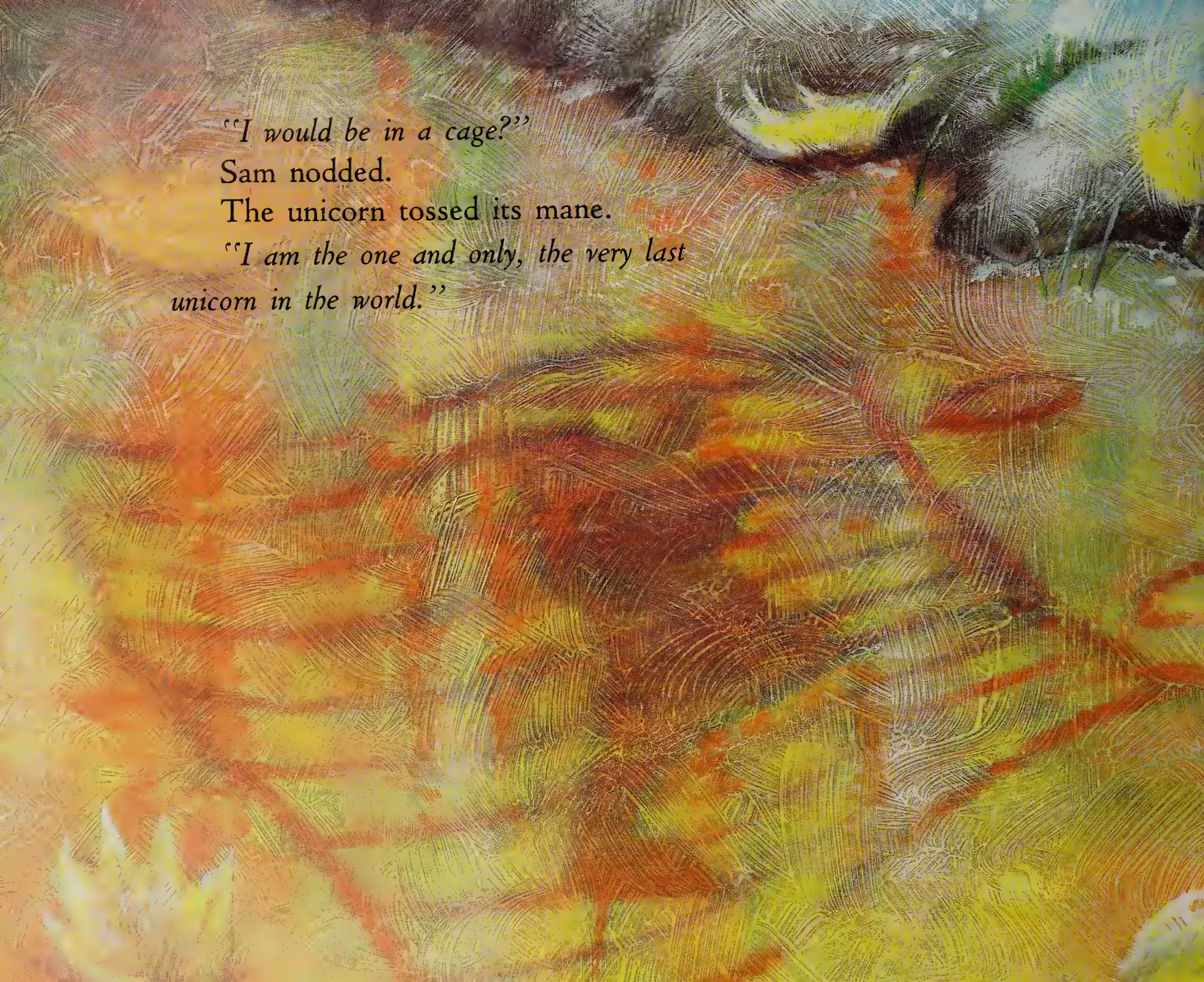
The unicorn seemed to understand.



Animals paced up and down behind wires and bars and cages. Monkeys chattered and parakeets screeched as the unicorn walked among them.



"I would have food and shelter here?"
"Yes!" said Sam.
"And thousands would come to see me?"
"Millions!"

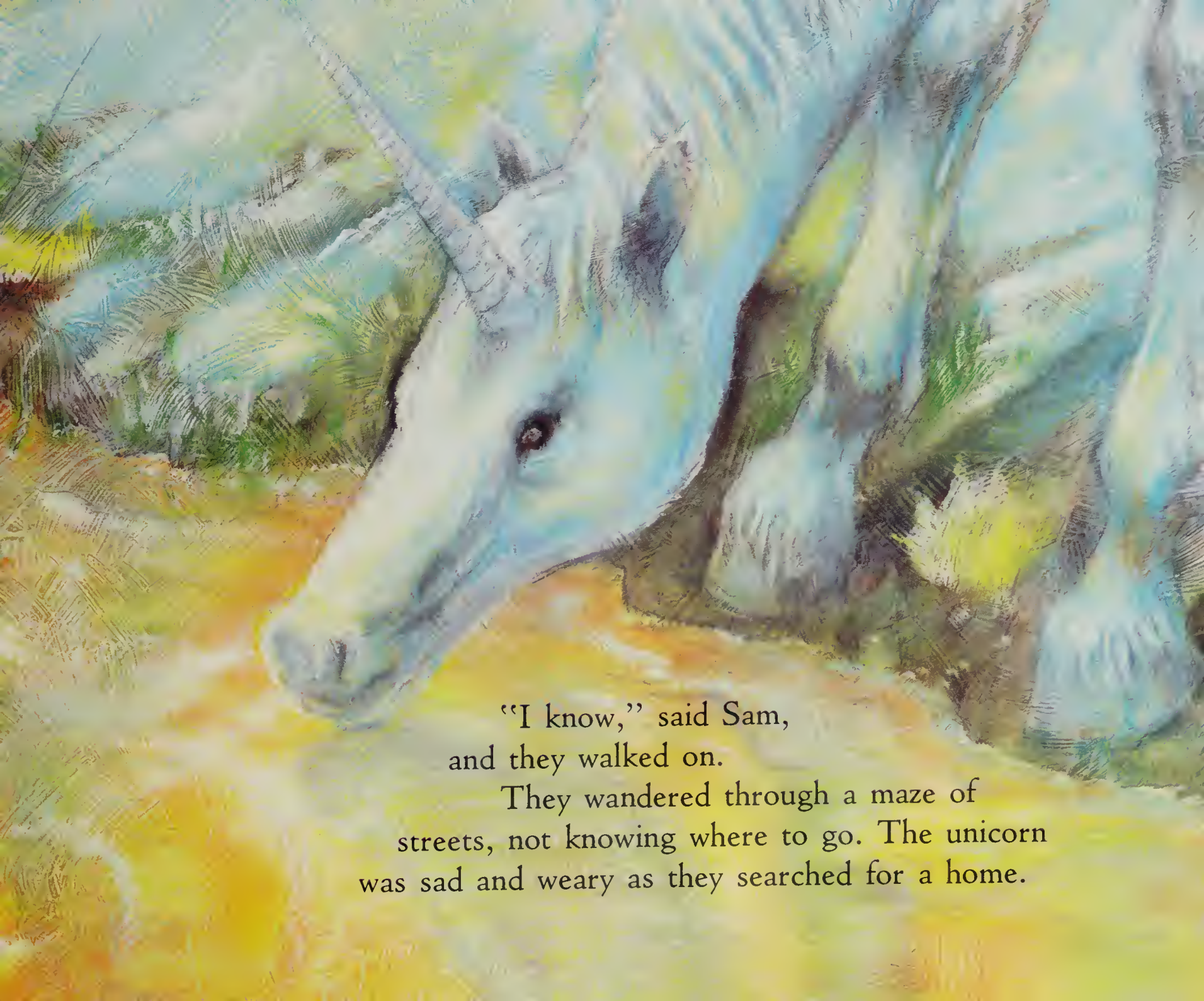


"I would be in a cage?"

Sam nodded.

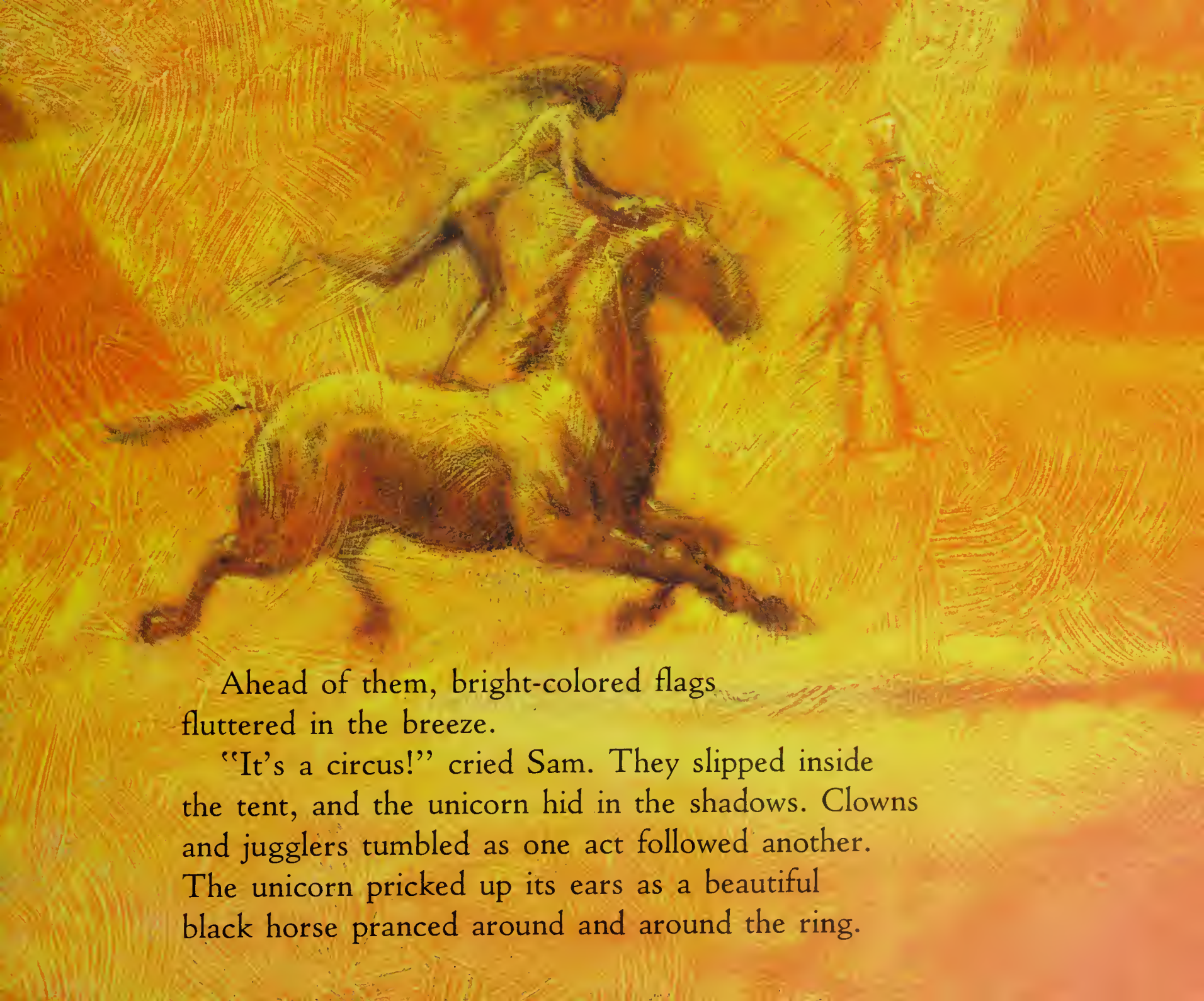
The unicorn tossed its mane.

"I am the one and only, the very last unicorn in the world."



"I know," said Sam,
and they walked on.

They wandered through a maze of streets, not knowing where to go. The unicorn was sad and weary as they searched for a home.



Ahead of them, bright-colored flags fluttered in the breeze.

"It's a circus!" cried Sam. They slipped inside the tent, and the unicorn hid in the shadows. Clowns and jugglers tumbled as one act followed another. The unicorn pricked up its ears as a beautiful black horse pranced around and around the ring.

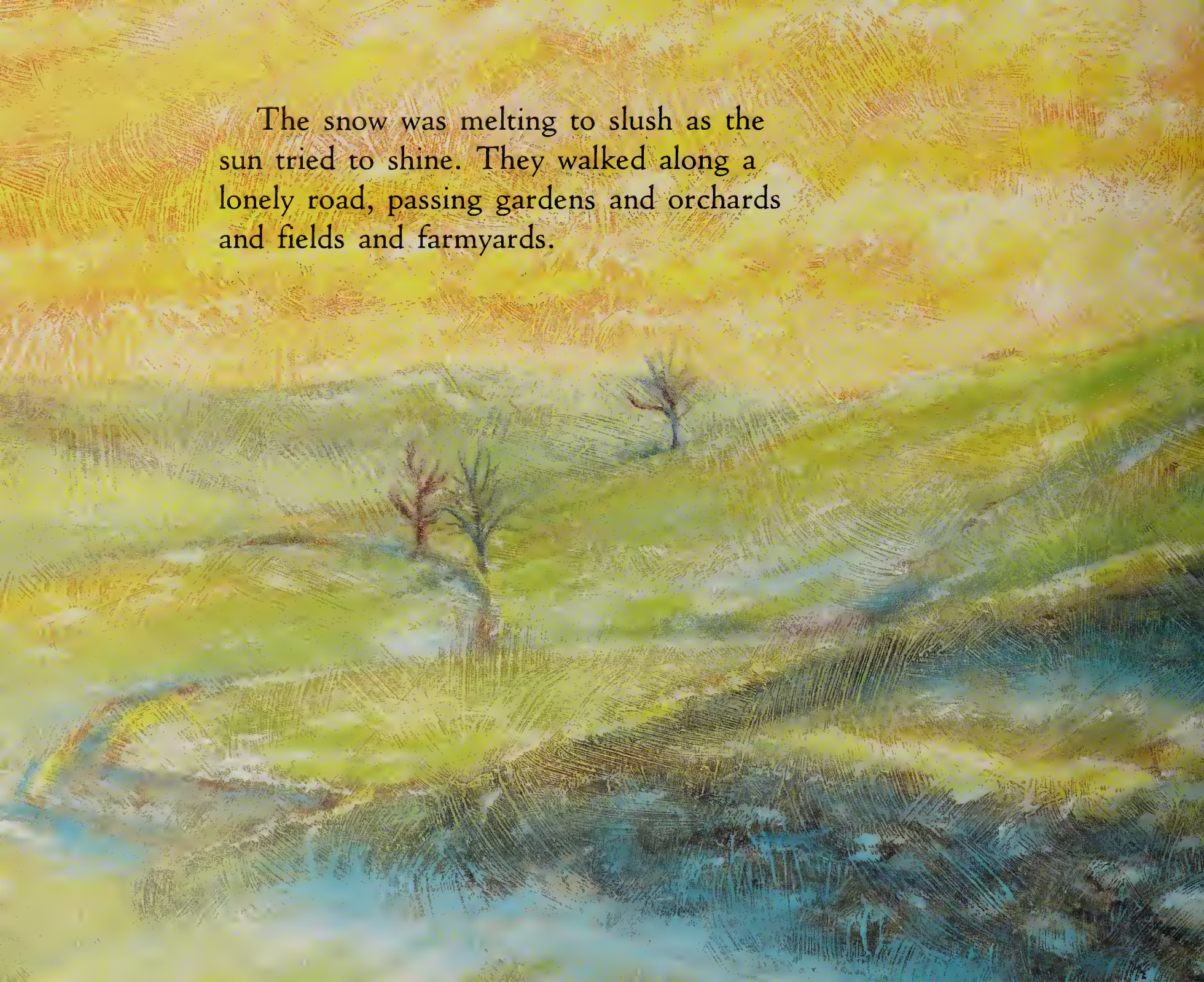
"If you joined the circus, you'd go from town to town, and everyone would cheer for you," said Sam.

"*From town to town?*"

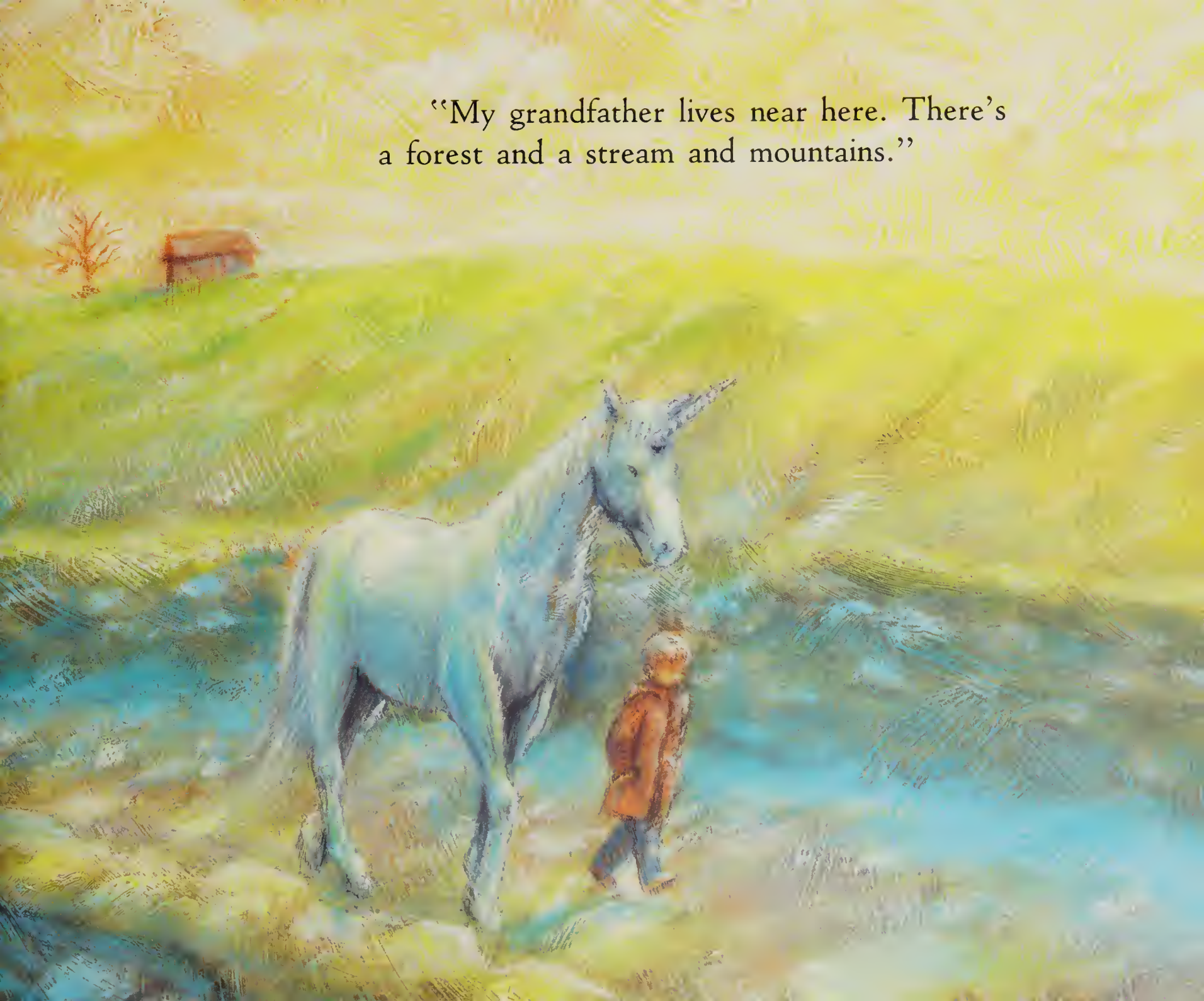
"Yes." Sam stroked the unicorn's nose.

"*I am the one and only, the very last unicorn in the world.*"

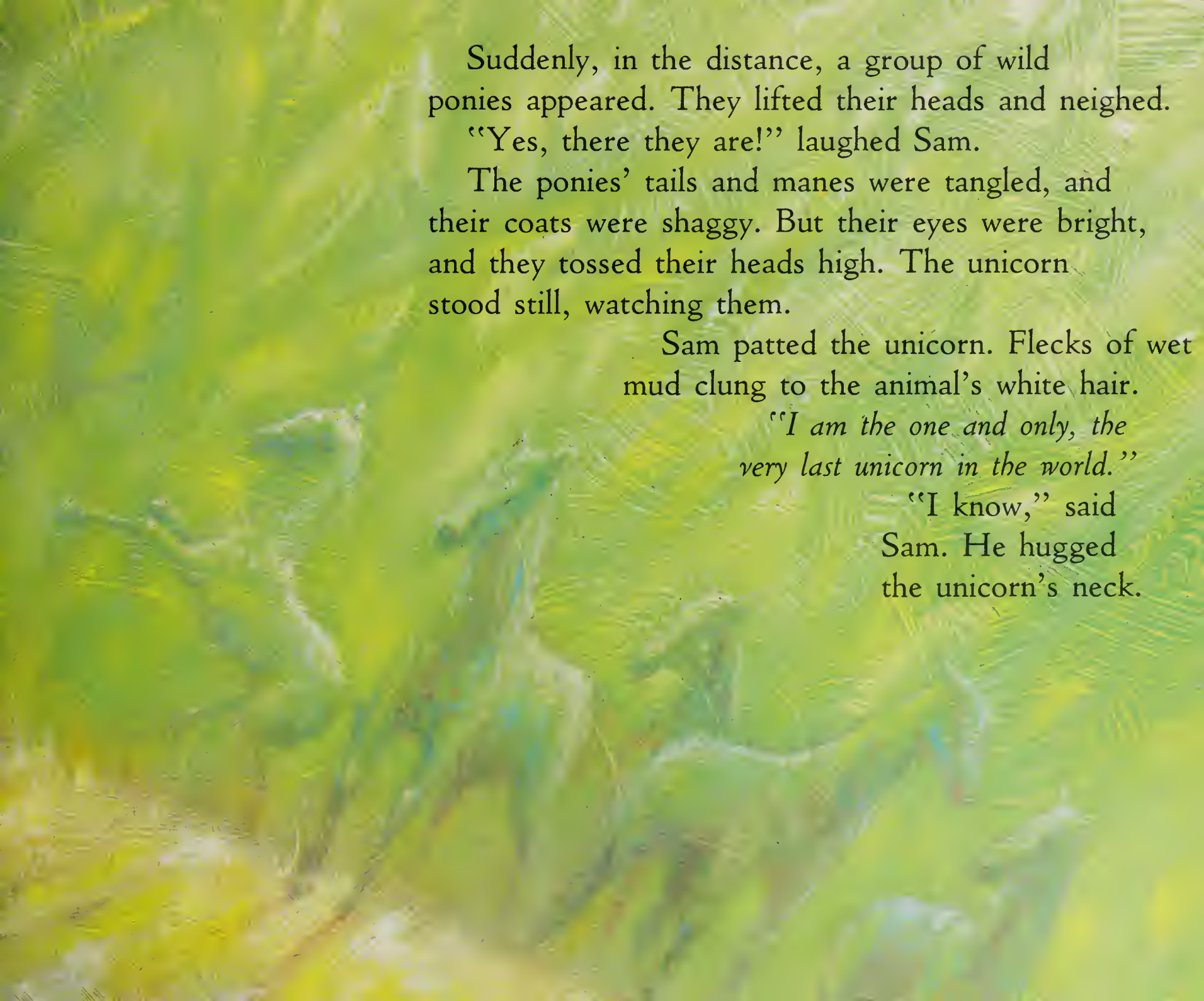
"I know," said Sam, and they walked on.



The snow was melting to slush as the sun tried to shine. They walked along a lonely road, passing gardens and orchards and fields and farmyards.



"My grandfather lives near here. There's a forest and a stream and mountains."



Suddenly, in the distance, a group of wild ponies appeared. They lifted their heads and neighed.

"Yes, there they are!" laughed Sam.

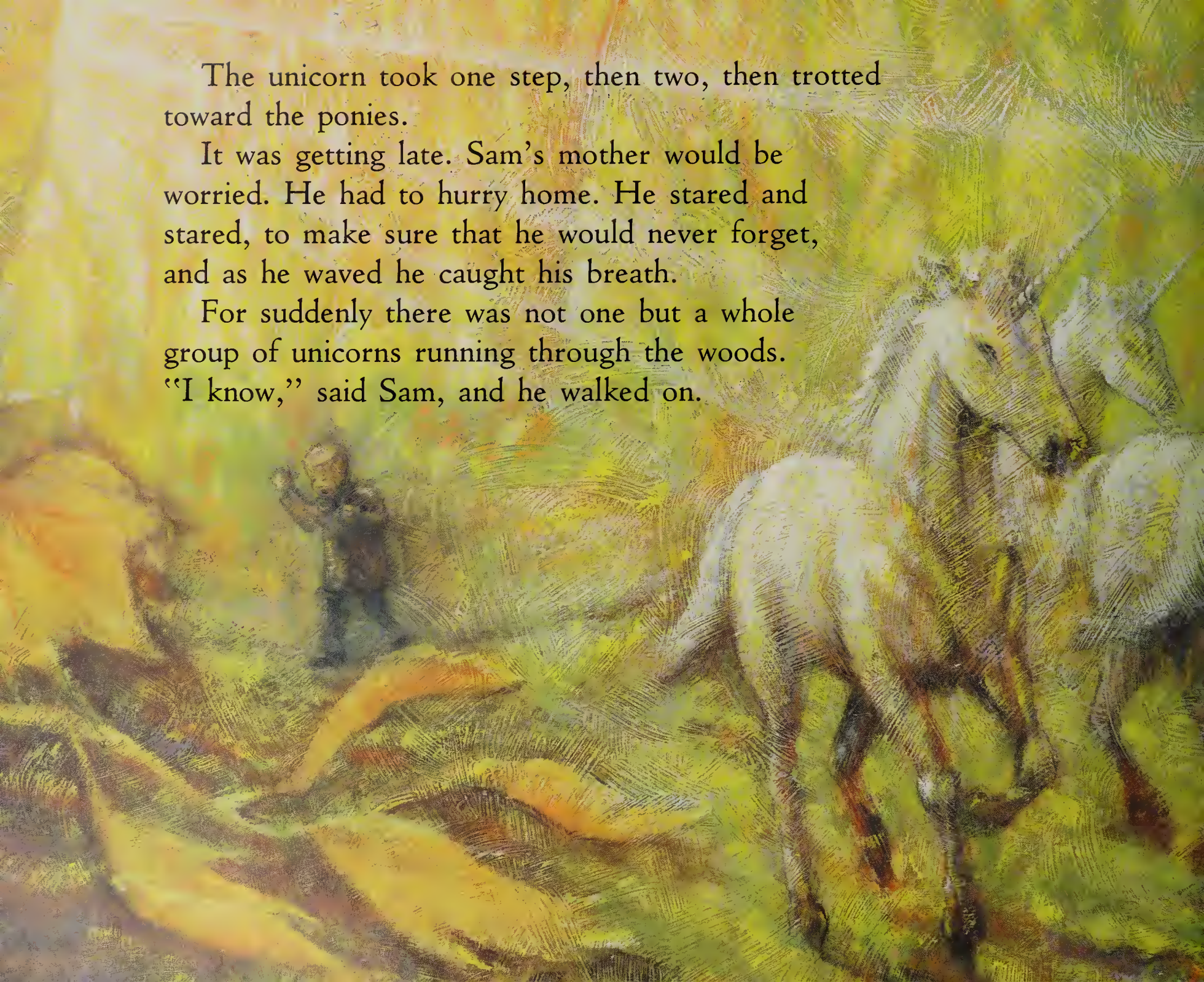
The ponies' tails and manes were tangled, and their coats were shaggy. But their eyes were bright, and they tossed their heads high. The unicorn stood still, watching them.

Sam patted the unicorn. Flecks of wet mud clung to the animal's white hair.

"*I am the one and only, the very last unicorn in the world.*"

"I know," said Sam. He hugged the unicorn's neck.

The ponies called again.
"Go!" said Sam. "It's safe here.
I'll visit you."



The unicorn took one step, then two, then trotted toward the ponies.

It was getting late. Sam's mother would be worried. He had to hurry home. He stared and stared, to make sure that he would never forget, and as he waved he caught his breath.

For suddenly there was not one but a whole group of unicorns running through the woods. "I know," said Sam, and he walked on.

Marita Conlon-McKenna is the author of three widely praised books for young readers, *Under the Hawthorne Tree*, its sequel, *Wildflower Girl*, and *Little Star*. She lives with her husband and four children in Dublin, Ireland.

Christopher Coady made a remarkable debut with his first picture book for children, *Red Riding Hood*, and is also the illustrator of Marita Conlon-McKenna's *Little Star*. He received his B.A. in illustration from Manchester Polytechnic and now makes his home in Manchester, England.

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